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Slootman, M.W.

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Ethnic-minority climbers: evaluating "minority cultures of mobility" as a lens to study Dutch minority student organizations

Marieke Slootman

Department of Sociology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The increasing discomfort with ethnic diversity in many countries is paralleled by the emergence of middle classes consisting of second-generation immigrants who articulate their minority identities. This calls for an enhanced understanding of the experiences and identifications of social climbers with minority backgrounds. In this article, I explore the relevance of the idea of a "minority culture of mobility" (MCM) as a lens to look at these processes of integration, using the case of Dutch student organizations with ethnic-minority signatures. Based on parallels with the literature, I conclude that the MCM is a useful framework, also for contexts outside the United States. At the same time, observed variations between ethnic groups and changes over time within the Dutch context lay down a research agenda in order to further refine the model.

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Currently, the offspring of migrants who migrated in the seventies and eighties is coming of age. Many of these immigrants came from so-called non-western countries and had low formal education levels. Increasing proportions of the second generation show social mobility. They reach high education levels and middle-class positions, both in Europe (Crul and Schneider 2009) and in the United States (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2002).

Unlike widespread expectations, this assimilation in the socioeconomic domain is not always accompanied by complete assimilation in the sociocultural domain. Many social climbers with minority backgrounds, whom I call "minority climbers", articulate their ethnic identity and are drawn towards coethnics. In the Netherlands, like in many other countries, this leads to

CONTACT Marieke Slootman mariekeslootman@yahoo.com

disapproval by the ethnic majority, who increasingly demands cultural, identificational and social assimilation (Ghorashi 2009; Slootman and Duyvendak 2015). This rejection is grounded in the widespread idea that orientations towards the nation of residence and towards a minority ethnicity are mutually exclusive. This is fed by the idea that the supposedly homogeneous Dutch culture, portrayed as extremely progressive and secular, is currently threatened by the presence of cultural "Others", Muslims in particular (Uitermark, Duyvendak, and Mepschen 2014; Slootman and Duyvendak 2016). Ethnic-minority orientation is seen as an expression of segregation and withdrawal from society, hence as a threat to "good integration". This situation calls for an enhanced and nuanced understanding of the experiences and identifications of minority climbers. It calls for an enhanced understanding of when and why minority climbers are drawn to coethnics, how they articulate their ethnic identity, and for further examination of minority middle-class spaces and cultures. Do these develop? Why? When? What do these look like?

The concept of a "minority culture of mobility" (MCM) as developed by Neckerman, Carter, and Lee (1999) helps to answer these questions. Although it is originally developed as an extension of the famous segmented assimilation theory and is described in relation to the American context, the argument that minority climbers share experiences and challenges, and hence develop distinctive cultural elements – a "MCM" – forms an interesting angle from which to study the experiences and positionings of minority climbers, also outside the United States. The idea of an MCM directs our attention to the specific intersection of ethnicity and class, and to the interaction of general social mechanisms and particular group strategies. On a more concrete level, it helps us understand why individuals with certain minority backgrounds draw together "even" when they are highly educated and have high-status jobs, and hence are regarded as socioeconomically "integrated". It guides our explorations of whether a common middle-class culture exists among minorities in various contexts, and if there are common effects of social mobility across groups. Nevertheless, despite these promises, the idea of an MCM has not gained wide resonance, and when used (see, for example, Agius Vallejo 2009, 2012), it has primarily been applied in descriptive ways.

In acknowledgement of its potential, I explore the applicability of this US-based model for the European context, for the Netherlands in particular, by examining university student organizations with minority signatures that cater for students with ethnic-minority backgrounds. These minority signatures can be ethnic, or can relate to religions that are practised predominantly by people from ethnic-minority groups. I use the landscape of minority student organizations to explore the presence and shape(s) of MCMs in the Netherlands. If MCMs exist here, what are features that are shared across contexts, pointing to generic mechanisms at work? What are differences that expose the impact of the particular local context?

This Dutch case is meant as an exploration of these themes, functioning as a test case to evaluate the relevance of the MCM model outside the context of the United States. Based on the activities of the student organizations and in-depth interviews with minority climbers, I identify elements that seem to form core aspects of MCMs, which indeed point to the applicability of the model for the Dutch context. At the same time, this case reveals variations that point to the effect of context factors that are particular to specific groups and times. Based on these variations, I argue that the model needs further elaboration in order to better capture the experiences and positionings of minority climbers.

In the next sections, I introduce the idea of an MCM as described by Neckerman, Carter and Lee, followed by a description of the context and setup of the study. I then present the landscape of minority student organizations in the Dutch cities Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Subsequently, I focus on the content of MCMs, the cultural elements. I describe the African-American and Mexican-American cases of the literature, analyse the activities of the Dutch student organizations, and, based on interview data, shine further light on the value of minority student organizations for their members. The article concludes with a reflection on the use of the model.

The concept of an MCM

Kathryn Neckerman, Prudence Carter and Jennifer Lee (1999) introduced the concept of a "MCM" as an extension of segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993). Neckerman et al. argue that middle classes of native minorities exist, which form a separate societal segment for second-generation immigrants to integrate into. In this way, the existing black middle class forms a social and cultural segment that other ethnic-minority climbers can integrate into. The authors argue that minority climbers with low-class backgrounds have developed specific cultural elements in response to specific challenges stemming from their distinctive position as middle-class minorities. Compared with their coethnics, who are predominantly lower class, the climbers relatively frequently engage with whites in their workplaces and neighbourhoods. In these settings, high pressure exists to conform to white middle-class speech patterns and interactional styles. Hence, the climbers are more likely to encounter discrimination and prejudice than their lower-class coethnics (1999, 950), in more subtle forms (see also Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2015). Compared with middle-class whites, minority climbers have frequent interclass encounters, as most coethnics – for example in their kin networks – are lower class. These poorer coethnics often have different tastes and buying power, and they may depend on financial assistance and/or make strong claims for assistance. Sometimes, these coethnics feel intimidated by or even resent the achieved middle-class position and the

accompanying practices and styles of the social climbers (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999, 951).

According to Neckerman et al., these challenges and circumstances give rise to particular cultural elements, which they call a "MCM", and which they describe as follows:

> By the minority culture of mobility, we mean a set of cultural elements that is associated with a minority group, and that provides strategies for managing economic mobility in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage. The minority culture of mobility draws on available symbols, idioms and practices to respond to distinctive problems of being middle class and minority. It includes knowledge and behavioural strategies that help to negotiate the competing demands of the white mainstream and the minority community. But it also includes symbolic elements, particularly those relevant to problems of ambiguous identity and affiliation – will one identify (or be identified) in terms of class, ethnic group, or both? – that often accompany minority middle-class status. (1999, 949)

Clearly, the idea of a "MCM" can prove an informative lens for researching and understanding processes of integration and social mobility among minorities, and the emergence of middle classes who articulate their minority identity. Nevertheless, the article of Neckerman et al. also raises questions that call for clarification and further research. Firstly, their description of the African-American case is much more elaborate on the challenges than on the exact responsive strategies and cultural elements that form the actual MCM. Consequently, within the MCM framework, we need detailed descriptions of what particular MCMs actually look like, which help in identifying elements that can be regarded central to MCMs. Secondly, Neckerman et al. point out that MCMs need not be identical across groups and contexts, as they supposedly depend on the level of ethnic ascription, discrimination, solidarity, stereotypes, as well as the socioeconomic position of the minority group, its internal cohesion, cultural idioms, practices and institutions (951–952). They do not further elaborate on the mechanisms and effect of these factors. They also mention, unsubstantiated, that "some version of [the MCM] is found in all minority groups" (951), but that such culture is unlikely to be formed by "newcomers" (949). Is it really true that MCMs are found in all minority groups? Do MCMs form among immigrant offspring? How are the particular elements affected by the national, local and group context?

As shared cultural elements are unlikely to form among isolated individuals, the social aspect is a crucial dimension of MCMs. Neckerman et al. in their article frequently mention networks, groups, and organizations. In the one other case description that is explicitly framed in terms of the MCM (of socially mobile Mexican Americans) Agius Vallejo emphasizes the importance of "ethnic social and civic spaces" (2009, 133), as professional organizations are the spaces where MCMs according to her manifest (2012, 675). Minority

student associations, which are the focus of the current study, are examples of such "ethnic social and civic spaces" where minority climbers gather. Student associations provide a practical angle from which to study MCMs, as their connections to universities and the visibility needed for attracting prospective student members makes them into a clear, delineated and identifiable landscape.

The Dutch case

Twenty-two per cent of the Dutch population of 17 million has an immigrant background, either as first or as second generation. The largest ethnic groups are formed by citizens with a background in Turkey (397,000), Morocco (386,000) and Surinam (349,000) (Statistics Netherlands 2016). It is primarily these groups that the widely used term *allochtonen* ("foreigners") refers to, a depreciatory term, only very recently discarded. Most immigrants from Morocco and Turkey arrived in the seventies to work in low-skilled jobs. For a long time, their stay was assumed to be temporal, and integration was not a policy aim (Scholten 2011). Most of these immigrants came from rural areas, had low levels of formal education and were Muslim. Most immigrants from Surinam arrived shortly before Surinam became independent from the Netherlands in 1975. The Surinamese were highly diverse in ethno-cultural terms, skin colour, class and profession. Despite the fact that they had Dutch passports, they were seen as foreigners (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).

In the Netherlands, notions of race and ethnicity generally have become conflated and demarcate the same social boundaries. Although the term "race" is not explicitly used in Dutch society (apart from in very recent discussions), the terms "black" and "white" pervade Dutch language, for example, in reference to schools and neighbourhoods with relatively high and low percentages of citizens with backgrounds in so-called non-Western countries (including former colonies). The concepts are also entwined through the fact that most citizens of colour in the Netherlands, contrary to the United States, are first- or second-generation immigrants to (the continental part of) the Netherlands. In the light of the fact that in the United States the concepts race and ethnicity usually are more separated, it is noteworthy that Neckerman et al. use race ("black") and ethnicity ("African-American") interchangeably, and refer to "coethnics" in relation to black Americans.

Research approach

The first step was to sketch the landscape of active minority university student organizations. Based on an internet search,[1] I listed all university-affiliated minority student organizations that are currently active in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the two Dutch cities with the largest shares of citizens with immigrant

backgrounds. Three universities are located in these cities: the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), the University of Amsterdam (UvA), and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). Most organizations had a website and a Facebook page with organizational descriptions and announcements of activities. I labelled an organization as a minority organization when the organization in its organizational description explicitly mentioned the minority signature, and/or indicated to cater in the first place for students with ethnic-minority backgrounds. Considering the fact that most Muslims in the Netherlands have an ethnic-minority background (SCP 2012), it can safely be assumed that Islamic organizations are dominated by students with ethnic-minority backgrounds. I considered organizations to be active when they had announced activities in the previous twelve months. I compared the grade of organization between the various ethnic groups, and used listings of minority organizations from 1997 and 2005 (ECHO 1997; MiraMedia 2005) to consider developments over time.

The second step was to examine the cultural elements through an analysis of the activities of five selected organizations, and available interview data. I listed the activities organized in the past twelve months and coded them into four categories that emerged through an inductive coding process. Interviews with minority climbers, conducted during a previous research project, provide additional insights from the perspective of students once involved in these organizations.

Varying and changing presence of minority student organizations

Table 1 lists the identified minority organizations with their signature, university/city and year of establishment.

Comparing this list to the ethnic student composition at the three universities gives an impression of the level of organization of the various ethnic groups. In all three universities, students with backgrounds in Surinam, Morocco and Turkey form the largest ethnic-minority groups (Wekker et al. 2016, 31). At the Erasmus University, 4 per cent of the first-year Bachelor students in 2015 has a Surinamese background (which means that at least one of their parents is born in Surinam), 3 per cent has a background in Morocco and another 3 per cent in Turkey. For the UvA, these shares are 3, 1 and 2 per cent, and for the VU four, four and three.

Clearly, the organizational landscape does not mirror the university student composition. While at the three universities five organizations exist that explicitly cater for students with a background in Turkey (four with a Turkish and one with a Kurdish signature), there are no organizations with Moroccan signatures, and only one organization has a Surinamese signature, but this organization primarily serves international students. A look at two overviews

Table 1. Overview of minority university student associations in Amsterdam/Rotterdam.

Name	Signature	Univ./ City
Turkish/Kurdish (year of establishment)		
Anatolia (1999)	Turkish	VU
Marmara (2015)	Turkish	R'dam
Mozaik (1995)	Turkish	EUR
SUN (Studenten Unie NL) (*see also below*) (1995)	Muslim/Turkish	VU
KSVN (Koerdische Studenten Vereniging NL) (1993)	Kurdish	NL
Muslim		
SUN (Studenten Unie NL) (*see also above*) (1995)	Muslim/Turkish	VU
Avicenna (1996) (medical themes)	Muslim/Multicultural	EUR
IQRA (<2005)	Muslim	EUR
ISA (Islamitische Studentenvereniging A'dam) (2009)	Muslim/Multicultural	VU
Racism/Decolonialism		
Amsterdam United (2014)	Multicultural	UvA
ASAH (2006)	African	EUR
New Urban Collective (2011)	Cultural diversity	A'dam
University of Colour (2015)	Decolonization	UvA
Hindu/Jewish		
HSFN-Amsterdam (Hindoe Studenten Forum NL)	Hindu	A'dam
HSFN-Rotterdam (Hindoe Studenten Forum NL)	Hindu	EUR
IJAR Amsterdam	Jewish youth	UvA
Other ethnicities		
ARIA	Afghan	EUR
ASN (Aziatische Studenten NL)	Asian youth	UvA
CSA-EUR (Chinese Student Association)	Chinese	EUR
EESA (Eastern European Student Association)	Eastern European	EUR
EVAO (Eritreese Vereniging in A'dam eo)	Eritrean	A'dam
IYC-NL (Iraqi Youth Council NL	Iraqi youth	NL
JONC (Jongeren Org. Nederlandse Chinezen)	Chinese youth	NL
PPI Rotterdam (Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia)	Indonesian	EUR
ROSAN	Romanian	EUR
SSA (Surinamese Students Abroad)	Surinamese internat. st.	EUR
Sv Manzil (Pakistaans)	Pakistani	EUR

Source: internet analysis.

of "multicultural student organizations" in Rotterdam and Amsterdam from 1997 and 2005, presented in Table 2, reveals that the difference between students with Turkish backgrounds and other minority students is quite stable. Also in these previous years, Turkish-Dutch students were more strongly organized than students from the other ethnic categories. Turkish-Dutch students founded more organizations, and more of these organizations have survived until today.

The longitudinal comparison also reveals that in earlier years Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch students had higher levels of organization than they have now. In 1997 and 2005, there were several organizations with Moroccan and Surinamese signatures. The only organization that was included in the old lists as "Moroccan" that still exists, Avicenna, now calls itself Islamic. This does not mean, however, that Moroccan-Dutch students are no longer members of minority organizations. The names of the board and committee members mentioned at the ISA and IQRA websites indicate that many of these active members have a Moroccan background.[2]

Table 2. Presence of organizations in 1997, 2005 and 2017 in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Name	Signature	1997	2005	2017
TSV	Turkish	v	v	
Turquoise	Turkish	v		
SPDA	Turkish		v	
Marmara (current Marmara is a new org)	Turkish		v	
Mozaik	**Turkish**	**v**	**v**	**v**
(SUN) Studenten Unie NL	**Turkish/Muslim**	**v**	**v**	**v**
Anatolia	**Turkish**		**v**	**v**
KSVN	**Kurdish**		**v**	**v**
UNEM	Moroccan	v		
Eurabia	Moroccan	v	v	
Atlas	Moroccan		v	
Avicenna	**Then: Moroccan Now: Muslim**		**v**	**v**
Salaam	Muslim		v	
ISV Iqra	**Muslim**		**v**	**v**
VSSS	Surinamese	v		
Studiname	Surinamese	v	v	
Ver. Surinaamse Studenten A'dam (SVVA)	Surinamese		v	
Vereniging Antilliaans Studenten Platform	Antillean and Aruban	v		
Passaat	Antillean and Aruban	v	v	
Lawamena	Moluccan		v	
Aziatische Studenten Nederland (ASN)	**Asian**		**v**	**v**
JONC	**Chinese**		**v**	**v**
EJSVAO (now: EVAO)	**Eritrean**		**v**	**v**
Indonesische Studentenvereniging PPI	**Indonesian**	**v**	**v**	**v**

Note: organizations in bold: those that are mentioned in 1997 and/or 2005 that still exist in 2017. Excluded are organizations that are (currently) no student organizations but NGOs (*stichtingen)*.

(Unfortunately, Avicenna's website was offline during this analysis). Furthermore, the names confirm the expectation that Islamic organizations are dominated by students with ethnic-minority backgrounds; except for one, all names were identified as not-ethnic Dutch.

The comparison between students of Moroccan and Turkish descent is interesting, as these immigrant groups have very similar immigration backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses and religion, and they experience similar levels of stigmatization, as they are both the main targets of an increasingly exclusionary integration discourse which is particularly hostile towards Islam. Apparently, we need to zoom-in on other group characteristics to explain the organizational differences. The continued existence of Turkish student organizations parallels the relatively strong cohesion and high organizational level among Turkish Dutch in general. Many citizens of Turkish descent form close-knit, well-organized communities, which are closely linked to the political/religious structure in Turkey (Fennema and Tillie 1999; Vermeulen and Brünger 2014). This is much less the case for citizens of Moroccan descent, which form a more heterogeneous, disconnected group. The difference in cohesion is also a consequence of the fact that all Turkish immigrants spoke the same language while the Moroccan immigrants came from different ethnic groups in Morocco and had different mother tongues.

Furthermore, while for many Turkish Dutch the Turkish identity forms a strong label and a source of pride, this is much less the case for many Moroccan immigrants, who, as ethnic minorities in Morocco, had subordinated positions there (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). These group characteristics help us understand why the students with a Turkish background have persistently strong levels of organization, while organizations with Moroccan signatures disappeared. That Moroccan-Dutch students are members of (multi-ethnic) Islamic organizations instead, parallels the increasing salience of religion (read: Islam) in the integration debate in the Netherlands and elsewhere, which goes hand in glove with an increased articulation of Muslim identities, particularly among Moroccan-Dutch youth (De Koning 2008).

The existence of the minority student organizations does not imply that all minority students are members of such organizations, nor that all members are solely members of minority organizations. Additional research should indicate how broad and exclusive the membership is. Important to note is that many of the *majority*-dominated student organizations are not perceived as very open or attractive to minorities. Particularly the large traditional fraternities and sororities are known for their elitism and extreme alcohol consumption. The pictures at the websites of the Amsterdam fraternity (*Amsterdamsch Studenten Corps*) and the Rotterdam fraternity (*Rotterdamsch Studenten Corps*)[3] confirm this image, and furthermore show that these organizations are very white. Minority students are aware of this. In Santing and Vermeulen (2017), a Dutch-Turkish student describes this contrast:

> Such fraternities, with the elite, with people who want to have a real student-live and live in lodgings (…) [Others students] particularly Turkish Dutch, often still live with their parents and do not party till late three nights a week. [Translation MS]

The elements of an MCM: roles and activities

Neckerman, Carter and Lee's article is relatively detailed regarding the challenges faced by minority climbers in general. The authors, however, are less explicit about the cultural elements they deem central to MCMs. Nevertheless, the case description of African-American climbers does mention some cultural elements of this particular MCM. For example, in response to the exclusion and prejudice faced in white-dominated middle-class contexts, these climbers – often to their own frustration – employ various strategies to signal their middle-class status to white people: they speak a pointed standard English, use conversational ploys, assume certain interests and display expensive clothing. In contexts dominated by lower-class coethnics, the climbers switch to lower-class speech patterns and use their familiarity with the street culture to manage their interclass relations, trying to fend off

disapproval for being "white-washed" or a "race traitor". The climbers often support poorer kin in various ways, and have ongoing conversations among themselves about cross-class obligations and ways to "give back". The idiom of a "shared fate", used by poorer coethnics to demand cross-class solidarity, is reworked by the climbers into the argument that their achievements help advance the race by dispelling racial stereotypes and providing role models and support. The climbers create expressive and interpretive frameworks about the practice of straddling two worlds. In these frameworks, the accommodation of white middle-class demands is validated and is understood as not necessarily jeopardizing one's private ethnic identity. Furthermore, the climbers develop knowledge about mechanisms of exclusion, which have become more subtle over time; the authors mention that "(s)ophistication about this kind of bias is itself an element of the African-American culture of mobility" (953). The African-American climbers "take refuge" in black-dominated social spaces, in which they are sheltered from the strain they experience in their interactions with whites. In these spaces, they share experiences with one another, use ethnic African-American symbolic and interactional styles (which are not specified by the authors), and exchange strategies for manoeuvring within white-dominant environments.

Agius Vallejo's discussion of the Mexican-American case (which is also most detailed on the faced challenges) also gives some examples of cultural elements of an MCM. A central mobility strategy she observes among Mexican-American climbers is "creating and joining ethnic professional organizations" that have the goal "to provide Mexican Americans with the social and cultural capital that will help them cross class and ethnic boundaries" (2012, 678). For example, the (women's) organization that Agius Vallejo studied offered business education through monthly breakfast meetings with themes like "How to build your business team" and "The art of negotiation". Other events organized by this organization focused on socialization into white middle-class etiquette, such as styles of dress, interactional codes (firm hand shake, eye contact), speech patterns, table manners and behaviour on the golf course. These events also functioned as opportunities for networking and socializing with other middle-class Latinos. In these social spaces, the climbers use "Spanglish", discuss salsa dancing and Spanish language movies, have Mexican barbecues and exchange "war stories" about interactions with middle-class whites. Agius Vallejo quotes a respondent explaining that in these contexts "(w)e talk about things like politics and situations in business, because they went to college just like I did, and they live in the same world that I do" (2012, 675). Within this organization, the ethnic-minority identity is explicitly articulated through the consistent self-identification as "Latinas" and "Mexicanas", which is connected with the empowering organizational slogan "Si, se puede" ("Yes, we can"), a motto borrowed from the American United Farm Workers. The climbers in this organization aim to shatter

stereotypes and promote a "more mainstream image" of Mexicans. Other aspects that can be regarded as elements of the MCM are the financial support the climbers provided to less advantaged coethnics, and the underlying "immigrant narrative" (2012, 673). The felt obligation to "give back" is rooted in this narrative in which the achieved mobility is placed in the context of the sacrifices of their immigrant parents.

The two cases contain very similar cultural elements. Both Neckerman et al. and Agius Vallejo describe that in the erected social spaces the climbers exchange mobility strategies, and that these social spaces provide shelter from everyday experiences of discrimination, forming places where minority climbers unwind and use interactional and symbolic styles that are aligned with both their ethnic background and education level. In other words, these social spaces function as "safe spaces", autonomous spaces where people who feel marginalized can share their experiences. This protective "cushioning" function has also been mentioned in the literature about immigrants in general as the main reason newly arrived groups often establish separate organizations (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005; Vermeulen 2006).

Specific for the social climbers is the articulation of a distinctive middle-class minority identity, which combines the validation of (white) middle-class styles and the articulation of the minority identity. Also specific for the social climbers is the fostering of coethnic cross-class solidary. Resonating with what is described elsewhere (Slootman 2014b), this suggests that MCMs are not merely about the articulation of existing minority identities, but about tailoring minority identities to the middle-class status. These tailored identities are connected to interpretive frameworks about social inequality. Here, Collins' discussion of black feminist thought helps to understand how these aspects are entwined (1986). Collins explains that the symbols and values of self-definition and self-valuation, which form black women's culture, provide an "ideological frame of reference (…) that assist [s] Black women in seeing the circumstances shaping race, class and gender oppression" (22). In short, consciousness about the workings of oppression is crucial for strengthening self-affirmation of minorities.

Activities of the Dutch minority student organizations

To identify elements of MCMs in the Dutch context, I first zoom-in on the activities of the Dutch student organizations. For this analysis, I selected five organizations that organized relatively many activities and vary in their signatures. These included Anatolia and Mozaik (Turkish), ISA and IQRA (Islamic) and Amsterdam United (diversity).

For this analysis, I first listed all activities that the five organizations organized in the last twelve months.[4] Then, I looked whether the activities could be organized into coherent categories. This led to the identification of four

categories, which can be seen as roles that these organizations play for their members: (a) provide entertainment (in Dutch they use gezelligheid, which translates as sociability/coziness), (b) enhance career and self-development, (c) shape and nurture minority identity and culture ("minority content") and (d) shape social engagement. Underlying all aims and events is another, overarching, role, which is (e) the social bonding with people who share a specific minority identity.

All ninety-five activities were coded. Forty-two were coded as "entertainment" (a). Examples are parties, dinners, paintball and beach volleyball events, and trips to Paris and Bali. Ten activities were career events (b), which included In-house days at possible future employers and a workshop networking. Here, we should take into account that being an active member of a student organization is career advancing in itself, as it is conducive to one's skills and network, and because active membership is valued at the labour market. The code "minority content" (c) (nineteen activities) refers to activities that primarily aim at developing and fostering the minority identity and culture. These activities are specific for organizations with a particular minority signature and are unlikely to be found in other organizations. Examples are Turkish language courses organized by the Turkish organizations, and a discussion evening on how to prepare for Ramadan, organized by one of the Islamic organizations. Furthermore, twenty-four activities were coded as "social engagement" (d), which included conferences on sustainability and populism, and a documentary night. The activities did not include any activities that explicitly aimed at "giving back" to coethnics, which is an interesting contrast with the American cases. This could be a consequence of the choice to focus on students, who have still very meagre financial positions (Vermeulen and Keskiner 2017).

Many activities were assigned a second code. Most of these double-coded activities concerned entertainment activities with some minority content (a party with a Turkish singer or Turkish food) or social engagement activities with some minority content. Many of the organized symposia had themes that related to the minority position in society and mechanisms of injustice. Examples are the themes populism, superdiversity and the role for Muslims in the public debate, but also the consequences of the Turkish coup for the Netherlands, and "Islam and organ donation" (in response to a government bill about donorship). These social engagement activities with a minority dimension clearly show that these minority climbers work on shaping their minority identity as higher educated in relation to the Dutch context, and partly define their identity in reference to societal mechanisms of injustice.

Although all roles are present in most organizations, the organizations differ in the specific cultural elements (such as Turkish language courses in Turkish organizations versus Arabic language courses in Islamic organizations), as well as in the broader profiles. For example, the two Turkish

organizations had relatively many entertainment activities (around 70 per cent) and a relatively narrow minority dimension, which primarily existed of Turkish flavours added to social activities (such as a barbecue with Turkish music). Less than 10 per cent of their events (8 and 6 per cent, respectively) solely aimed at the development of the Turkish culture or identity; examples are Turkish language courses and a workshop on Turkish poets. This contrasts with the two Islamic organizations, where the Islamic dimension is more than adding flavour. 57 per cent of ISA's and 20 per cent of IQRA's activities focus at developing the Islamic identity and faith (such as Arabic language courses, a symposium about halal food and about Ramadan preparation). Both Islamic organizations are relatively socially engaged, and nearly all these events were connected with the minority identity. Symposia, for example, focused on islamophobia or on Muslims' responsibilities in the public debate.

In the light of the relatively strong Turkish identity and cohesion within the broader Turkish-Dutch communities, it is not surprising that the exploration and reshaping of the minority identity is less active and prominent within the Turkish organizations than within the Islamic organizations, where the shaping of Islamic practices and identity is relatively central. Research has shown that for second-generation Moroccan Dutch, being-Muslim is not a continuation of their parents' religious practices, but rather is a reinvention of an own "de-Moroccanized" version of Islam (see De Koning 2008; Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming). Hence, the Islamic identity is connected with a search for identity and practices, at least for the Moroccan-Dutch second generation, which is reflected in the activities of the Islamic organizations.

Minority student organizations as soulmate spaces

The findings on the activities and the organizational roles are illuminated by personal stories. In a previous study, I interviewed second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers who were born around the moment of their parents' migration (see Slootman 2014a). They happened to be among the first members of Moroccan and Turkish university student organizations in the Netherlands. Some of the interviewees even were founders. Their stories shine light on the challenges faced and on their appreciation of the interactions with co-educated, coethnic peers. Being the educational pioneers of their ethnic groups, they attended higher-level secondary schools that were nearly exclusively white. Only when entering university, they met other higher-educated coethnics. This is a major contrast with the situation in the United States, where, due to much higher levels of residential segregation, colleges often form the first places where minority climbers interact with whites (Waters 1996). One of the Moroccan-Dutch interviewees, who until entering university had a primarily white peer network, recalls:

> The funny thing is – at university you find out – Yes, there I DID relate more to, well, Moroccan-Dutch students. This was kind of a change. In fact, your whole life you did not do that. There you meet soulmates [*lotgenoten*], higher-educated Moroccan-Dutch students. That was a real revelation. For all of us. We still are in contact. But I remember the moment of revelation at that time: "Apparently I am not alone" – I always felt THE exception. They were on your own wavelength, let's describe it this way. There were incredible levels of mutual understanding. Of course, that is fabulous. We surely all were … the outsider, you know. That was a fantastic period, indeed. I primarily related to Moroccan-Dutch people. Students. They were my best friends. (Slootman 2014a, 170)

Several interviewees describe this moment in similar emotional terms. Meeting these "soulmates" was a "revelation", an unexpected "relief", a "peak experience". Together, these soulmates formed spaces, organizations, in which "a whole new world" enfolded, where the interviewees could "urgently" share their experiences; where they felt no need to explain themselves anymore. The soulmate spaces formed safe spaces to jointly explore what their ethnicity meant for them as higher educated, as also the following quote illustrates:

> So, at that moment I started to explore my roots, also via my studies, as I did a research project in Morocco. And I became active in the student environment. Yes, Muslim, Moroccan, whatever, youth association as well – I have since then been very involved with the Moroccan community. I very much enjoyed it. It gave me heaps of energy, and it really made me grow as a person in that period. (Slootman 2014a, 172)

This mutual understanding was grounded in experiences of exclusion in white environments. Some interviewees had been bullied during their entire childhood. Others had felt as an outsider because their parents never allowed them to join in extracurricular events, or because of their second-hand clothes, relatively large families, or the unfamiliarity of their parents with the Dutch language and education system. Their outsider position was caused by a combination of their ethnicity and migration background.

That the encounter with higher-educated coethnics created this blissful experience, while such feelings of connectedness had not existed previously with the coethnics in their family networks, shows that this mutual understanding is strongly shaped by the educational level. Their education level appears to have shaped both their everyday experiences and their attitudes in specific ways. For example, some interviewees experienced high pressure from family and other coethnics to be successful and proceed with their mobility, while at the same time they were extra pressured to behave as "good" Moroccans/Turks/Muslims and to not become "too Dutch". Particularly as role models who climbed into white middle-class settings, their behaviour was "put under a microscope". Among coethnic, co-educated soulmates, they felt no longer scrutinized. Several (female) interviewees explained how

they – after initially avoiding coethnic students, expecting them to be as conservative and judgmental as the coethnics they knew – finally came to feel like fish in the water among them, when they found out that these peers shared their own progressive and emancipated attitudes. These experiences are backed up by data from a large survey among Dutch-born young adults with Turkish-, Moroccan- and Dutch-born parents (see Slootman 2014a). These data show that regarding gender-equality norms, education level is more influential than ethnic background, and higher-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch are more similar to ethnic Dutch than to lower educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch (Slootman 2014a, 180).

Clearly, these stories support and illustrate the findings of the organizational analysis. Resonating with the literature on the US context, the Moroccan- and the Turkish-Dutch climbers founded organizations to enjoy a safe space among likeminded people – people for whom their ethnic and migration background in combination with their education level led to shared experiences and attitudes. In these spaces, they safely explored what their ethnicity meant to them, and developed their ethnic identities in accordance with their high education level.

Parallels and variations. Developing MCM as a lens

What have we learned from the Dutch minority student organizations about the existence and shapes of MCMs outside the United States, and about why minority climbers are drawn towards each other?

In line with the American cases described in the literature, the Dutch case shows that Moroccan and Turkish Dutch minority climbers experience a mutual understanding that springs from shared experiences (challenges) and shared dispositions (attitudes, interests and language use) that result from their minority background in combination with their highly educated, middle-class position. This mutual understanding binds them together and leads to the creation of social spaces in which these "soulmates", shielded from social pressures and mechanisms of exclusion, develop their own ethnic identity and their own MCMs.

The analysis of the organizational activities shows that the minority student organizations, although they vary in the exact activities they organize and the exact cultural elements they develop (such as specific identity labels, speech patterns, food preferences and interpretive frameworks), fulfil comparable roles across groups. Five roles are identified in the Dutch case, which are also found in the two American cases. The organizations aim to (a) provide entertainment, (b) enhance career and self-development, (c) nurture minority identity and culture, and reshape them in alignment with their educational/class position and systems of exclusion and (d) mobilize and shape social engagement as higher-educated minorities. Overarching is the fifth role,

which is (e) the social bonding with people who share a specific minority identity and educational/class position, with coethnic, co-educated soulmates.

The common affinity between minority climbers, the similarities in the challenges they face and the shared organizational roles indicate that minority climbers occupy distinctive positions that are comparable across contexts, and that they develop their own strategies (practices and interpretive frames) in response. The model of a "MCM" proves to be a valuable lens to understand the experiences of minority climbers, the emergence of ethnic-minority organizations and the articulation of minority identities, also outside the United States. Note that, contrary to what the term seems to imply, "MCMs" are more about *dealing* with social mobility than merely *achieving* social mobility.

At the same time, as we have seen, the presence of Dutch minority student organizations varies and is dynamic. The level of organization varies between ethnic groups, activities differ and signatures change over time. This shows that not in all cases MCMs develop, and that their forms vary and change. The comparison of Moroccan and Turkish Dutch illustrated how group factors and national factors shape the existence, signature and content of the MCMs. The relatively strong group cohesion, the shared parental language and the strong Turkish identity explain the persistently strong level of organization among Turkish-Dutch students. The heterogeneity among Moroccan immigrants, in terms of social cohesion, language and ethnic identity, in combination with the increased salience of the Islam in Dutch discourse, explain why student organizations with Moroccan signatures disappeared and made way for multi-ethnic Islamic organizations, which strongly focus on the development of a (de-ethnicized) Islamic identity and Islamic practices.

Noticing and studying these differences is an important step in advancing the "MCM" as a model to understand the experiences, needs and strategies of minority climbers. To further extend the framework, we need more comparative studies and qualitative research that explore how minority climbers experience these challenges and respond to them. The distinction between (the general) roles and (the specific) cultural elements can be helpful here, as they illuminate the interaction of general social mechanisms and particular group strategies. We should study the emergence, but also the absence, disappearance and varying shapes of MCMs. This requires attention for factors on the national and international level (such as integration policies, political discussions, structural inequalities, exclusion and segregation) and on the group level (such as community cohesion, level of community organization, strength of minority identity, internal factions and external solidarities, but also resources, numbers and the phase of integration). Additional research on the individual level can educate us on how MCMs get shape at the individual level, and on individual choices to join or not to join minority middle-class organizations.

The applicability of the model to the Dutch situation shows that Neckerman's model also forms an extension of segmented assimilation theory in contexts without established minority middle-class segments, and with relatively low levels of residential segregation. Also in the Dutch context, the MCM forms an alternative trajectory of incorporation. This conclusion helps nuance polarized integration discourses, in which minority identifications are regarded with distrust. Instead of being expressions of withdrawal from society and retention of traditions, minority middle-class spaces and MCMs reflect processes of innovation and reinvention in response to processes of integration. Minority climbers attempt to align the minority identity with their new class position in the broader society, and to deal with the everyday experiences of exclusion that accompany their socioeconomic advancement. These socially mobile pioneers create a form of integration in which they refrain from complete cultural assimilation and articulate an (ethnic) minority identity, which is tailored to their middle-class position in the society of residence.

Notes

1. Starting point formed the general overviews of student associations of the three universities. (http://www.vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/contact-routebeschrijving/adressen-en-telefoonnummers/studentenorganisaties/niet-facultaire-verenigingen/index.aspx; http://student.uva.nl/az/content/verenigingen/studentenverenigingen/studentenverenigingen.html; https://www.eur.nl/essc/ontplooiing/regelingen/overzicht_verenigingen/) [accessed 29 March 2017]. A few organizations were added after a crosscheck with the following sources: ASVA website (UvA), Kaseur website (EUR), ECHO report (1997), Miramedia (2005), Wekker et al. (2016).
2. Twelvenames of the twenty-six current ISA board and committee members were Moroccan names. For IQRA, this was the case for eight names of the twelve members of the 2016/17 and 2015/16 boards. The names were identified as Moroccan by a colleague of Moroccan descent. Sources: www.svisa.nl/bestuur and www.sviqra.nl/vereniging/bestuur/oud-besturen [accessed 5 February 2018].
3. http://www.asc-avsv.nl; http://www.hetrsc.nl [accessed 15 April 2017].
4. As Amsterdam United organized less activities, their activities of the last fifteen months were included.

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